

New Law Requiring Medical Supervision

For California's Agricultural Workers Using Organophosphorous Pesticides

THE NEW Agricultural Safety Orders adopted in November, 1961, by the California Industrial Safety Board require that medical supervision be provided for agricultural employees who regularly work with certain toxic phosphate ester (organophosphorous) pesticides: parathion, Phosdrin, Thimet, TEPP (tetraethyl-pyrophosphate), methyl parathion, EPN, OMPA, and Di-Syston.

These Orders were adopted as a necessary step to combat the increasingly serious problem of phosphate ester poisoning in farm workers. The orders are enforced by the Division of Industrial Safety of the State Department of Industrial Relations. The requirements for medical supervision appear in Section 3298.14 as follows:

"(a) *Medical Supervision.* Where employees are regularly occupied in the spreading, spraying, dusting, or other application or formulation of organic phosphate injurious materials, the employer shall engage the service of a licensed physician to provide medical supervision. Medical supervision shall include advance planning for prompt care of organic phosphate poisoning, and cholinesterase determinations or other recognized medical tests to be made on each employee before any exposure to these materials and as often thereafter as recommended by the physician.

"(b) *Record of Physician's Recommendations.* The employer shall keep a record of all recommendations made by the medical supervisor and such record shall be made available to the Division of Industrial Safety on request.

"(c) *Restricted Activities.* When, in the opinion of the employer's medical authority, continued exposure to organic phosphate injurious materials is likely to injure an employee's health, such employee shall be removed from the exposure."

As a service to their communities, local medical associations through their occupational health committees can set up a roster of physicians available and can assist these physicians to obtain the technical information and consultation needed. Physicians interested in providing medical supervision for these agricultural workers must become acquainted with the properties of organophosphorous chemicals as well as standard procedures for setting up medical programs for workers. Much of this information is available through bulletins published by the Bureau of Occupational Health of the State Department of Public Health, 2151 Berkeley Way, Berkeley 4.

Medical supervision has more to offer in the prevention and treatment of organophosphorous poisoning than it has for many other occupational hazards. First, there is the cholinesterase test which can detect excessive exposure before workers become sick. Second, there is an antidote for poisoning, which if administered early and in adequate amounts, can save the lives of victims who have absorbed several times the fatal dose.

COMMITTEE ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

Comments and Questions Are Welcomed by the Committee

* This is the eighth of a series of articles prepared by the Committee on Occupational Health.
(The article "You Gotta Have Heart," previously scheduled for this issue will be printed later.)